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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/EPA (CBOURGEOIS)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEPI - ARABIC BOOK TRANSLATION PROGRAM

REF: SECSTATE 145089

1. POST HAS DISCUSSED SUBJECT PROGRAM WITH RELEVANT JORDAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OFFICIALS. THE MOE IS INTERESTED, IN PRINCIPAL, IN PARTICIPATION. HOWEVER, THE FINAL DECISION MUST BE MADE BY THE MINISTER HIMSELF, WHO WILL ONLY RESPOND TO A WRITTEN PROPOSAL, AND WHO WOULD WANT TO PERSONALLY VET THE BOOKS BEFORE SENDING THEM TO CLASSROOMS. THAT SAID, THE INITIATIVE TRACKS WELL WITH THE MINISTRY'S OWN EFFORTS AND WOULD MOST LIKELY BE A WELCOME ADDITION TO THEIR PROGRAM FOR IMPROVING CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, PROVIDED THAT THE BOOKS ARE INDEED CULTURALLY SENSITIVE AND APPROPRIATE FOR JORDANIAN STUDENTS.

2. SHOULD THE MOE EVENTUALLY DECIDE NOT TO PARTICIPATE, WE EXPECT THAT A NUMBER OF JORDANIAN PRIVATE SCHOOLS WOULD BE INTERESTED.

3. THERE REMAINS GREAT REGIONAL ANXIETY OVER PERCEIVED U.S. INTENTIONS TO "INFILTRATE" THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF ARAB COUNTRIES AND "CORRUPT" ARAB VALUES. WITH THIS IN MIND, JORDANIAN OFFICIALS WOULD DOUBTLESS BE MORE AMENABLE TO A LOW KEY PROGRAM THAT PRODUCES SOLID BENEFITS TO CHILDREN, BUT WHICH FORGOES HIGH PROFILE MEDIA COVERAGE.

4. IF MOE APPROVES, A PILOT PROJECT ON A LIMITED SCALE COULD CONCEIVABLY BE LAUNCHED BY JANUARY 2004.

5. WE LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING MORE ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE.

BERRY#